

How to run an effective complaints review panel

Addressing complaints at an early stage

You have concerns about the number of complaints that are being escalated to the complaints review panel.

Below are some suggested actions the governing board could consider in addressing this.

- Is there enough detail in the complaints policy on how the staff member/headteacher should receive and address the informal complaint? Could this be expanded to ensure that it is acknowledged and addressed in line with the DfE's complaints guidance?
- Consider using a parental survey which includes several questions related to complaints. This could include questions on how parents feel their concerns are listened to, how approachable they find the head/staff/ whether they are aware of the school complaints policy etc.
- It is important that the responses from any parent survey are heard and acted upon and followed up in a further survey. The chair/board should be prepared to have a 'courageous conversation' if necessary with the headteacher.
- Suggest the formation of a parent forum if there is not one in place to increase parental engagement.
- Suggest training for the headteacher/staff on complaints management.
- Is there a sufficient dialogue between the school (all levels of staff) and parents? Maybe set up a governors/trustees working group to look at parental engagement at all levels.
- Review types and patterns of complaint to see if any recurring problems causing complaints can be fixed
- If there does appear to be a 'group' of parents who are causing issues; does the home school agreement need revisiting?
- Include as part of the panel's questioning how the parent felt their initial concern was received and responded to.
- Is there a stage of the process where conversations between the complainant and the chair or a mediator can take place which may result in the complaint not being escalated further?

It is worth noting that sometimes, people will never be satisfied with the outcome because it is not what they want and as the complaints policy sets out that it can always be escalated, there will be times, no matter how well the concerns and earlier stages are handled, that the complainant will insist on a review panel.